

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

INFORMANT: DANIAL UK

INTERVIEWER: QUABAH BANTA

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D=DAN

Q=QUABAH

Q: Today is April 11, 2016. I'm here with Dan. Hello!

D: Hi there. [Both laugh]

Q: Okay, let's start with the first question. What year were you born in?

D: So I was born in (--) I'll start with, oh my name is Daniel Uk. I was born on September 14, 1994, (Q: Okay) a long time ago.

Q: Where did you grow up?

D: So I was born in Fairfax County, Virginia. So right around there I was, I was living there until about four years old, and then from there I moved over to Lowell, Massachusetts. So I was raised here in Lowell for most of my life.

Q: Okay. What is one of your favorite childhood memories?

D: Ah, favorite childhood memories? That's, oh man. There's quite a bit. Um, oh that's tough. So I was living (--) Okay, so mom and my sister [Lornabe] were living on 71 Butterfield Street. So that's part of the Acres neighborhood. And during that time, this was early 2000s of Lowell, Massachusetts. So it's a much different Lowell from how Lowell, Massachusetts is now. So a lot of it was a [hiking] prevalence. And so not a lot, there's not a lot of time where kids are out, outside playing. So mom decided to either put me into summer school during the summer so I can like have a place to stay, or the Boys and Girls Club, but during school times since I wasn't allowed to stay after school due to like the [hiking] prevalence like around the city, mom had like this old collection of old comedies. And so one memory was actually like being at home with my sister watching an entire marathon of the "Golden Girls" on DVD. And it was hilarious.

We would like, we would just make popcorn in the microwave and just like pop a CD in, a DVD in and just like watch from season I to season VII, or whatever like season mom got. Yeah, it was pretty awesome. That was a good memory.

Q: Aw, that's nice. So where did your family, or your mom and your sister come from originally?

D: So my sister was born here in Lowell, Massachusetts. She's seven years younger than me. My mom and my dad were from Cambodia. My dad and his family were immigrants specifically from Cambodia. They were very lucky and very fortunate enough to emigrate here before year zero happened in Cambodia. And so because of that like my family on my dad's side don't really have any horror stories whatsoever, no PTSD, and none of that stuff. Unlike my mom, my mom and my grandmother, and my uncles and aunts, they suffer from PTSD. It was much worse before growing up as oppose to now. It's taken them about thirty-five years to recover, but yah. So they went through all four years of the genocide era in Cambodia and they were very fortunate to, to be alive today.

Q: So how was life like through elementary school and a high school for you?

D: Elementary school and a high school? Okay. Oh man this is awesome. These are good questions. So elementary school through high school, um, I remember in elementary school I was at the Lowell Charter School for a bit, and then I transferred over to the Bailey School in Lowell, Mass. And the dynamics of like, of like demographics were much different then. There's a large Latino population and black population I remember in elementary school. And like literally it's just like, it was probably like the most fun in school you'll ever have is like elementary and middle school. Elementary school is just like [vibrant] and culture. Everybody was, everybody was playing basketball. Everybody was like was shopping for Jordan's. [Q: Laughs] That's why I'm like fixated with the shoes up until today. It was awesome. And so like from elementary school, from like kindergarten to fourth grade, there was already like tons of like a diversity and inclusivity, because like everyone was, were people of color, different cultures, just everyone accepting that and embracing it.

Middle school was a huge switch. Gang prevalence was getting much worse. So mom decided to, mom and dad decided to put me in private middle school. So that was a huge change for me, because now I'm going from like a culturally vibrant and accepting community, albeit very impoverished, to now a very posh middle school of more suburbanite children. The majority of them were Caucasian and also like, and also immigrants from Nigeria and Kenya. So we had some, we had some culture in the private middle school.

Q: But not as much, because compared to the (--)

D: Not as much compared to, to just like the community in Lowell at the time. And a lot of it was really restricting, because it was a Catholic middle school or a Christian rather. And so me, I'm, my family practices the Buddhist philosophy. So technically we're atheist. And also I was

the only Cambodian American in the middle school. So a lot of it I faced like a bit of adversity, although it was like a very small school setting. It was only about ten to fifteen students per grade, yah, really small. So you get to know everyone like real fast. You know everybody. Everybody knows your business and stuff like that. It was still fun to go to, but like clothing was restricted (Q: I don't like that) to uniforms. So it was a very interesting part of growing up. Puberty hit during middle school too. So that was tough. And I think that was sort of when like I started noticing like I probably was the one who is different in school, simply because one, I was the only Cambodian American on top of being the only Asian American. And a lot of bullying happened because of that. Yah, but it builds character during middle school though.

And the question was up to high school?

Q: Yah.

D: Okay. So high school was a very great switch back to public high school. I was so happy. And I think right when it hit high school that was when I noticed there was a huge Cambodian population in Lowell, Mass. Like before, before I didn't really notice race up until middle school, which was made very apparent due to the demographics in middle school. Right when high school comes, my first day I didn't know, I really didn't know how like fashion was.

Q: Wow.

D: So I wore my uniform from middle school to the first day in high school. [Q: Laughs] And I was like, okay, yah, school. Yah, no one is going to worry about like what I'm wearing. First day when I get to like, like the freshman building, literally just like there are tons of just, a huge ton of Cambodian Americans just like running into the school, and just like chatting and just talking, and just having, just having some fun on the first day. And I just literally scratch my head and I looked around and I'm like, wow, like I went from being like the smallest minority in middle school to being like probably like the majority of the entire school. And I'm like I don't know like how to, what to think about this. I don't know how to feel about this, but like that's when I noticed everybody was wearing like extremely brand named clothes and I'm here in like the khaki pants, like a polo, navy blue polo, and I'm just like okay, now I got to worry about like how I'm going to be perceived. [Laughs] So that was an interesting high school year, but it was great. Um, didn't really enjoy high school as much as others did. Let's just say that I was really excited to finish high school. [Both laugh]

Q: So then who were your friends like in school and stuff?

D: In high school?

Q: Yah.

D: Um, let's see. I was, I was actually seen as like a, I guess among Cambodian Americans I was seen as like the kid who was different. So that was, that was unfortunate, because I really

wanted to, I really wanted to embrace like the sort of like, I guess the majority demographic simply because I could identify racially as them, but at the same time like I was raised around like other vibrant cultures as well. So a lot of it was me [unclear] towards like just different cultures in general. So I had a very large diverse amount of friends. A lot of friends who identified as being American, but with culturally identities from Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, India, Pakistan, a lot of that. But what I noticed I think if anything, Cambodian Americans in high school, they tend to sort of just stick towards their own people who identify with the Cambodian culture for the most part and not so much with other cultures. And that could be why I was perceived as different, but I mean I liked getting to know people. I like talking and socializing a lot. And so like my friend, my social circle reflected that, yah.

Q: So, all right, skipping now to college. So what is your major?

D: So I'm a political science senior undergraduate.

Q: And why did you choose it?

D: So it started off with knowing like my family's history. And I recently got to know my family's history about a couple of months ago, so this semester. Due to whenever family like, I think like just drama within my family, I haven't gotten to know my dad's side of the family for about twenty years of my life. I'm just so fortunate to be able to contact them now. And so from there I learned that my grandfather was working a very important position in the Cambodian Embassy in Washington, DC when he was younger, when he emigrated to the U.S. And before that I've got about five generations of great grandfathers who were active in Cambodian politics over in the motherland in Cambodia.

Q: Nice.

D: And so I really didn't know anything about them when I chose political science. So it was a very big coincidence that I went into poly sci. A lot of it was due to the occupied Wall Street movement that happened during my junior, senior year of high school. And a lot of high school students doing really think about that stuff, but I researched it and it was talking about the 1%, the stuff you hear Bernie Sanders talking about now. People were protesting about it years before Bernie Sanders and it was great. I was, like I was raised in a working class family. And so like I understood the plight of being a part of the 99% and trying to, trying to ah, trying to I guess ascend to higher rungs of the socioeconomic ladder if you would, and not having anything change. And so I thought it was amazing. I'm a huge (--) I'm a huge enthusiast when it comes to civil rights movements and just mass protests in general throughout like American history. So I've researched the civil rights movement, women's rights movement, during the 60s and 70s the antiwar movement. So that was like something I thought is an amazing and [unclear] part of American culture. And then like senior year hits, occupy Wall Street. I thought it was like the biggest thing ever. And so I think that's sort of what propelled me into political science. And from there when undergrad was started, I started researching lots of trials and tribulations if you would that a lot of under-represented minority groups go through in the U.S.

And so a lot of my focus is I guess, sort of public policy, which assist with whatever social and economic issues that underrepresented minorities face now. And that's sort of where I want to be for my career a couple of years down the line.

Q: Okay. That's awesome. So your experience in college, how has it been different compared to high school?

D: It's much better. It's much better for sure. Let's see, it's a lot more freedom which I like. Smarter people for sure, more intelligent people, more socially aware people. The classes are much better and you have more of a, I have more of a, I guess, more empowerment in my classes, because I'm paying, my tuition goes towards like payment for a lot of things on campus. So I mean I feel like I shouldn't have to pay so much.

Q: Agreed.

D: But I mean since I'm paying I should take advantage of this empowerment somehow. It's been really great. It was (--) I had a pretty active undergrad throughout my four years. I was president of CASA, UMass Lowell's Cambodian American Student Association my sophomore year.

Q: Nice.

D: Thanks. I remember freshmen year I was just a member. Freshmen years I was a nobody. I was just another college student commuter going on campus doing my work, coming back home and just figuring out who I am I guess. But I went to one of the club meetings for CASA and I loved it so much. And I remember saying at the club meeting that, I introduced myself like, "Hi, my name is Daniel Uk. I'm going to be CASA's next president." [Both laugh]

Q: Nice.

D: It was a joke at that time, but I didn't think that it was going to happen, and it happened. And that year it was like probably one of the best years for the club. My sophomore year when I was running, when I was on the executive board, the club was nominated for seven awards at the Student Leadership Awards. Yah, we walked away with two of those seven awards. So we were happy simply because of the work we did amounted up to those nominations, and we walked away with two of them, which was really successful. Yah, a lot of it was really being active on campus for me. I got to work as a student alumni ambassador for a bit; got to work with the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor, Chancellor Marty Meehan at the time. So we worked a lot of philanthropy making sure that we're hosting events that would show past alumni that the school is progressing due to their generous donations and gifts that they've given to UMass Lowell. And it's sort of a way of just giving back to the donors who've given so much to us. On top of that it's been a lot of work. This is my senior undergrad now so I really just want to finish up and just find a job.

Q: Yes.

D: So like that's, that's my focus. It's been great, but it's got to end right now. [Both laugh]

Q: So being in college here, have you made, well you kind of talked about this a little bit earlier, but have you made any new friends, or associates, or any new networks in college that were not of Asian ancestry?

D: Yeah, it's much more diverse here on campus. I think the statistics concerning demographics the last time I checked, people of color about 30% on campus, with 70% being majority white from surrounding areas in New England. And I mean in New England there's only so much diversity you can get. So yah, again like um, I'm a very, I'd like to think I'm a very sociable person and I really enjoy getting to know people from different backgrounds. So speaking with people and getting to know people who aren't of Asian descent, who aren't of Cambodian descent, is really exciting for me because I'm just learning from so many people. And I'm sort of, I'm sort of, well when I get to know somebody that's not of Asian descent, or just somebody in general, it's sort of me trying to tap into their perspective of their culture and seeing where they come from in life. And there's just, there's just so many opportunities getting to know people on campus, especially on campus. They become your network. People who are in those networks sometimes they become your friends, and sometimes those friends become friends for life. And so it's a lot of, it's a lot of meeting new people, putting yourself out there, and for the most part a lot of those networks they shape who you become after undergrad I'd like to think, and prepares you for what's beyond campus life after undergrad. And again, a lot of those networks will definitely come in handy for me when it comes for job hunting, when I'm stuck in a rut. God willing I'm not stuck in a rut after undergrad. But on top of that there's tons of good people, really great alumni, a lot of faculty members who definitely, I guess they don't see you just as a student, they see you as a person, and at times an equal to them, which is how things are supposed to be seen.

Q: Yes.

D: So yah.

Q: Okay. So in our Asian American Studies we talked about various topics, one kind of briefly you talked about it a little bit, but you did say you had siblings, or how many siblings do you have?

D: Ah, I have one younger sister.

Q: A younger sister, okay. So gender roles. How is that entwined in your family?

D: Oh man. Okay, so in my family it's extremely traditional. And I can't speak for any other Asian families. I can speak for my own. So my mom and dad, when I'm looking at my mom and dad and I'm thinking about gender roles, they fit exactly into the "social standards" if you would

for gender roles, for a man and a woman. And a lot of it was self-imposed like extremely I'm sure by my grandparents. And that affected how I was raised and how my sister was raised. My sister is (--) We have a seven year difference between each other. So for seven years I had to, I was sort of the prototype child if you would. So my parents, they had an arranged marriage. And even that has its own gender, gender roles imposed within arranged marriages. Being that the woman isn't able to be, to choose her husband and the husband sort of, the husband sort of sees somebody, they like that person and then asks for their hand, their parents for their hand in marriage. And so coming from a Khmer heritage and having that background growing up, there's definitely gender roles imposed on you based on your gender. So for (--) And it's probably different for, for Khmer people as opposed to other Asian American, Asian and Asian American cultures, but for, for a male you're supposed to be the bread winner. And my dad was a marine veteran.

Q: Nice.

D: In the, for the United States. And so as I was growing up it was expected of me to, and in my dad's eyes, be a man, and being a man meant doing man things. Being a, I mean going to the gym. I could do with that advice like right now actually, but like not going to the gym for your health, it was going to the gym to prove your manliness, or whatever. Or like it's, in his mind like going to the gym wasn't for health, it was more a man goes to the gym and becomes strong because he's a man. But again, that's a very problematic statement there, because oh, what about women going to the gym? You know, exactly, like exactly dad. Well anyway, on top of that I remember I couldn't play certain games. And they were very like, they were like jump rope and hopscotch and stuff, and that's seen as oh, that's not boyish enough. You should wrestle and stuff like that. And you shouldn't like specific colors and stuff like that. That was very self-imposed upon me and it continued up until my teenage years, because I think for my father the epitome of manhood was joining the military as he had. And so again, like when I was a teenager I didn't really feel like I wanted to join the army. My father wasn't the best male figure in my life to begin with. So that sort of, that sort of caused like a very huge rift between what I think being a man is and what my father thinks being a man is. So when I refused he sort of just didn't see me as enough of a man to gain his respect or whatever. And so that's tough, but I think I have a much better perception of what a man is compared to my father.

In terms of my mom, she's very traditional too in concerns with gender roles for women specifically. My sister was raised very traditional in the sense that woman has to cook. The woman in the family has to cook. She also is responsible for the household, making sure everything is clean. If ever I'm doing the chores, I'm not supposed to do the chores because of me being a male. That's my sister's job. And I think in Khmer culture there's this perception that like raising a girl is much harder to an extent, but I think at times it's due to a misconception that when a girl becomes a teenager she's going to be like out partying and hanging out with boys, and doing all of that. And a lot of girls growing up who are Khmer, who are a part of the Khmer community don't necessarily grow up to become that when they're teenagers. And my sister's fourteen years old right now, but I noticed as she was growing up

my mom had this fear of that, that she's not, that she's going to, she's not going to focus on school, etc., she's going to slack off, she's going to go partying. And this is at fourteen years old. [Both Laughs] So you can see there's like a, there's something that's not, there's something that's a little off with how my mom's perceiving my sister as she's growing up. And so a lot of it is me noticing this, and because we have a seven year difference, I sort of, I've sort of been there before my sister at some, in some circumstances there's still the gender difference. But a lot of it is just like advising my mom as my sister is growing up. My sister is a tomboy. She's doing really great in school. She's very active in high school, and she wants to go into marine biology.

Q: Nice.

D: But even with all of that my mom still thinks that if she stays after school for homework, or activities, that like she's going to slack off and just end up partying and stuff like that. And I keep telling mom, "Mom, she's fourteen years old and she's not going to slack off. Her grades are like extremely great and like she gets everything done on time and she passes in all of her tests. So I think you should like ease down a bit, because you're just really just, you really need to let go a bit." I mean I think raising a child, especially a girl with the mindset that she's going to be a certain way is wrong itself, because it takes away the potential that the child has growing up and it also, it also has, it's a negative expectation of a child. I think if anything when you're raising a child, whether it be a boy or a girl, you should have good expectations for them. That they're going to make something of themselves. And that you shouldn't have a negative perception maybe from birth with my mom that oh they're going to be a certain way when they grow up, yah.

Q: Yah, so with how traditional your parents are how does that affect your dating life?

D: My dating life?

Q: Or if you wanted to like date or something, how would that like (--)

D: Oh there are some stories. Man, okay. So this was (--) This was a huge issue when I was growing up. So it was as early as like eight years old.

Q: Eight?

D: Where my mom instilled in me the usual, "Daniel, Cambodian people or Khmer people should marry Khmer people." And note that she said married. So one, I have to marry a Khmer person. Two, I can't even date at all.

Q: Oh. [Laughs]

D: So it was, it was tough. Um, again there is a huge Khmer community in Lowell. So I mean if you're going to date a Khmer person there's a ton of options available. But again, this was in

high school. I only had about two decent relationships in high school, but I dated a lot more. I just thought it was much more, it was much better because there's really not as much commitment. Not that commitment is bad, but a lot of it was more fun because you're going out and you're not really, there's no commitment to like I guess spend devoted time with one person. Wherein you're getting, in dating you're just getting to know a larger variety of people and there's no expectation. So you're more, you have more fun getting to know the person. So there was a lot of that in high school.

But going back, since eight years old I was taught that I should only, I should only marry within my own race. And that was tough because again, like me being the person I am, I like getting to know other people, people of different cultures. But just to clarify, because of that it doesn't mean I have any less, I put any less value on women in my own culture.

Q: Yah.

D: And so that was tough for mom to understand when I told her, "Like mom, what if I have interest with someone not, not in my own race?" It was really tough for her to comprehend. It was very tough for my dad to comprehend. Even my grandmother, and my grandmother is, is much harsher when I brought it up with her. I noticed that colorism is very prevalent in Khmer culture. I'm sure in a lot of East Asian and Southeast Asian cultures and just in general amongst people of color. And so like a lot of what's said by like other relatives of the family is just really harsh when it comes to that conversation. And so I remember saying to my grandmother, "What if, like would you like, would you disown me if my, if my significant other was black? Would you disown me if my significant other is Latino?" And again, looks of contempt were highly evident. It even went so far as to some relatives saying that you shouldn't date black people because black people are descendants of slaves. And this is literally what was said by some relatives in my family. And that in dating someone who has ancestry being a part of the slave trades in America during the slave era, it's to have slave, "slave genetics" within your posterity. That's really bad, and that's very problematic, because not only does it have a huge amount of colorism based on like the color of one's skin and in relationships it also has to do with racism in the United States, and also their negative perceptions of African Americans in the United States. And again, um, there wasn't that much of a huge African American population in New England, in Lowell, Massachusetts to be specific during that time. But I always wondered like whether that had to do with more colorism specific to the color of skin tone amongst African Americans in the black community, or if it has to do more with racism specific to people being of African American or black descent in the United States. That's still something that I've always wondered till today, but I think if anything it's more a colorism is what I've noticed, that affects how my parents perceives certain things. Again, light skin is still considered like of the, like the highest beauty if you would in a lot of Southeast Asian cultures.

And so throughout I guess my dating life I didn't listen to my parents or family members. And the family member who did state the quote about colorism, it wasn't my, it wasn't my parents or my aunts and uncles. It was more the older generation. So that's unfortunate. I still have love for my grandparents, but at the same time I can't agree with that. It just, it just can't

happen. So a lot of it, a lot of those perceptions in terms of interracial dating were very negative. And so a lot of the girls I dated in high school were kept very secret. They were more personal if you would. And so with that negative perception, when I am, when I was dating interracial I just sort of kept it to myself. I didn't tell mom, I didn't tell dad, because I sort of, there's sort of the understanding that they're not going to understand, they're not going to accept. And there's always a difference between dating interracial for the person, and dating interracial for the sole purpose of racial [fetishisation]. So I was under, I was, at that time I understood the difference. And so a lot of the relationships I've had, and the number of times of dating, it was genuine if you would. And again it was just respect for another person's culture. It was just something that I think I sort of ingrained from the friends I've made, like the amount of friends I've at a young age. And so with that respect in culture I think that allowed me to have genuine interracial relationships throughout high school, throughout freshman undergrad. And I think it's really allowed me to be able to be as social as can be, or to be seen as like a, I guess a potential date in social circles, and stuff like that. But it was a lot of negativity when it came to dating.

Right now I'm in a same race relationship actually. And I'm sort of, it was probably my first same race relationship. And I've been together with my significant other for three years. We met towards the end of freshman undergrad. And so now I'm just like trying to understand the dynamics of a same race relationship. I think with some Asian American couples it's seen as like very strange. A lot of misperceptions about Asian Americans in general are that they stick to each other. They don't, or we don't extend outward. I can't speak for other people, but, but I noticed a lot of the perceptions about my relationship now is that oh we're just another Asian couple. Yah, and so that's tough, but again that's a problematic statement, because Caucasian people date the same race all the time, and I feel like maybe they should get some of the flack as opposed to Asian American couples. But at the same time interracial relationships don't make up as much of a huge percentage as same race relationships do. So it's, it's just a very common thing, but I think due to my race specifically, I, there's a lot of pushback, because I think the notion is interracial relationships are seen as the relationships of the 21st Century. I personally think a lot of relationships now are motivated by, are racially motivated. So that's racial fetishization of a person, and don't find that genuine in any sense. I don't find that by any means genuine, or I guess a beautiful relationship in any sense. And I sort of cherish my same race relationship even more because of that. It's sort of just being free from sexual and racial fetishization, both on my male part and my partner's female gender identity.

And when it comes to like relationships with my parents, my family obviously loves my significant other. She's amazing. She's an amazing person. She was valedictorian of her high school. She's amazing. Probably the first, I think, I would like to think the first ever Cambodian American female to be valedictorian at least, at least in New England. She's a nursing major. She's got a really great heart. She wants to work nursing because she wants to be able to assist people when they're in pain. And just seeing that whenever she talks about it is just, it just brighten my eyes.

Q: Oh wow!

D: I'm really attracted to that. It's just a person's passion and they're being able to devote their entire life to a specific cause because it is a just cause and they see that as a cause worthy enough for their life's devotion. And just seeing something, and seeing them, seeing someone who is able to acknowledge something big, that's bigger than themselves and devoting their life to it is just amazing. And that's something that I see in my significant other every day I'm with her. And she's an all-around keeper if anything. [Both laugh] So my problem, the problem I have is that my parents love her, but I'm not sure if they like her because of the person she is, or they simply like her because of her race? And that's the question that I have to deal with coming from a very conservative refugee and immigrant family. That's something that I've been thinking about for a while now, whether or not my family likes my girlfriend for herself, for the work she's done, for the achievements she's made and for who she is are genuinely, or whether or not, or if they like her simply because they fit their, I guess, perceptions of who I'm supposed to be with. So yah, that's how dating is with me, and like I guess the culture that I was born around in.

Q: Also in class we did talk about microaggressions. Um, have you experienced any microaggressions coming to UMass Lowell?

D: Yah, a lot of it, it's very complex. I was, let's see. Well I'm Khmer American. And so I faced a lot of microaggressions from a lot of fellow Asian Americans actually on campus, on top of people of other races and ethnicities as well. So a lot of Asian Americans outside of the Cambodian American Students Association consist of people of Vietnamese descent, people of Chinese descent, a lot of East Asian descent. And so, and so colorism is already highly prevalent within the general I guess Asian American demographic. And so being a person of Khmer descent, I consider myself a person of color obviously. My skin tone is much darker, of a darker pigment than most other Asian Americans. And because of that I'm faced with a lot of colorism that I'm seen as too black, and that white is the sort of, the sort of thing that you're supposed to work towards if you would. And so that's, so that's something I have to deal with within my own like community. And it's just tough when you're trying to get to know other people, because there's a lot of people who are prejudiced within even your own community too. And I mean like we joke about it all the time, team light skin, team dark skin. And sure, yah, it's funny when it comes to people who understand that that shouldn't be a reality.

Q: Yah.

D: So it's hilarious at those times, but when people actually really believe that, that's when you're like, "Wait, so you don't think this is a joke? So you think this is real? Wow, you're stupid." [Laughs] So a lot of it is just sort of having to sort of like gain my respect, or demand my respect in the Asian American community, because if you're Southeast Asian, or even South Asian, a lot of Asian American students I know kind of just don't, either don't count South Asians, or just neglect South Asians as being Asian American. If you're an Asian person of a darker skin tone from as southern or Southeast Asian region in Asia, or from that region, it's going to be an uphill battle even within that POC community. And so for a Khmer Americans

though I think what, what sort of helped me is sort of this notion of claiming a Khmer identity, and that's very, that parallels a lot with what we learned with, when we were reading about the chapter of mixed raced Asian Americans. Where a person who's mixed race, half black and half Asian American, with the black community there's a huge amount of not pressure, but an expectation of claiming a black identity as opposed to the Asian American community who, who doesn't have the same, who doesn't do the same. And so for being Khmer in the Asian American community there's sort of a coolness factor in claiming that you're Khmer American because of your darker pigment, because of a difference of I guess culture being in the United States. And so a lot of that makes, it keeps me resilient when it comes to microaggressions from fellow Asian Americans. And like I don't know, I guess it's, in my head it's like it's unfortunate that other fellow Asian Americans can't claim a Khmer heritage, because I just, I feel so proud to be of Khmer descent. I feel proud of at times of, I feel proud at times of how we're perceived in American media.

Again, with Asian Americans we're seen, for males at least we're seen as emasculated in American media, in the United States. For Khmer Americans we've had a much worse representation in the U.S. A lot of it during the 80s was a lot of gang violence as stated before. So, and a lot of, and I guess Cambodian males and Cambodian females are attributed to being criminals. A lot of it due to a number of gangs created during the 1980s to protect our communities. And just the, just the notion of just being a criminal in general, not only is it a bad thing to be attributed to crime, but what I think for the Asian American stereotype, I think if anything that sort of provides some malformed notion of masculinity for people in the Khmer community. It's sort of tough to understand, but if anything, it's good to know like you have some form or some identification of whatever socially institutionalized definition of masculinity there is in the United States. Although it's a very misguided sense of masculinity, it's something that I feel like a lot of Khmer Americans have to sort of I guess fit in, in this unfair world. So, and that's sort of ties into being, being Khmer, because again, in the Asian American community Khmer Americans are like the lowest of the low. We're like the, like we're, I guess we're the darkest, the dirtiest, the grimmest Asian Americans and so we don't fit in within our community as well. But I think I've reached that point where I embrace that. I embrace those type casts to an extent. And I see it as a strength to be of a darker pigment, to be coming from a poorer background, to be coming from, to be born in the U.S. but having ancestry that survived an entire genocide era. It's something to be proud of and it just builds character is what I personally think. And whatever problems that Cambodian Americans have persisted through in the United States, whether it be crime, early teen pregnancies, gang violence, we're persevering through that. We're gone through that. We've been through that. That builds character for an entire community, and should we be ashamed of what our community goes through? That's what every community goes through. And so I don't think we should be ashamed. I think we should see it as a means of moving forward, and to be able to have those trials and tribulations I'd like to think is a blessing if anything, because it builds character. I think if a community that doesn't go through these trials and tribulations as say the Khmer community has, or any impoverished underrepresented community has, doesn't have the same amount of character as a community who has gone through that. What was the question again? [Laughs]

Q: I felt like you answered it.

D: Okay, sweet.

Q: So what advice would you give to like young, little young men growing up and what they have to face with micro [unclear- lots of noise in background difficult to comprehend]?

D: Microaggressions?

Q: Yah.

D: Um, let's see. Oh I didn't even cover microaggressions from other races. Should I?

Q: Well talk. [Unclear]

D: Okay, yah, sure. Can I finish the last question?

Q: Sure, that's fine, that's fine.

D: Okay, sweet. I'm sorry.

Q: It's okay.

D: Okay, so yah, we covered microaggressions from like fellow Asian Americans. So there's a difference when it comes to people of other ethnicities and other races that aren't, that don't identify as AAPI, or Asian American Pacific Islander. So with Asian Americans I'm perceived as Cambodian, or Khmer American. When it comes to other races I'm perceived as Asian American, or more so Asian, and so that's tough, because I kind of see that as sort of the current paradigm of race, or the, of racial thought in the U.S., being polarized to black and white, and sometimes Latino. And it's really tough because for Asian Americans we're the most, globally we're a majority and we consist of a huge variety of different cultures within that, that generalized identification of being Asian. And so for me the only cultural identification with myself and being Asian is simply regional. My parents are from a country from Asia. So therefore that's the only identification I have of being Asian. But speaking more specifically, I have a deeper connection with being of Cambodian descent from the country of Cambodia. But to be able to verbalize that and to be able to state that to a person who generalizes you specifically as Asian, it's a waste of time and a waste of breath because more or less I don't think the person would understand. And for the most part a lot of this comes from Caucasian students and a number of black students as well. I don't really blame them for not knowing. A lot of the racial conversation we have is in the current black/white paradigm. And so to introduce someone who's of Latino descent or an indigenous person of North America coming into the conversation, a person of Asian American descent, or African American descent coming into the conversation, and I want to, I want to state that a person of African American

descent, someone who knows their cultural roots from Africa. So someone say from Uganda, but was born in the United States as opposed to someone from the black community in the United States whose ancestors were existent in the slave era of the United States, there's a distinct difference for sure. Introducing people who aren't part of the black/white racial paradigm into the conversation is paradigm shifting. And majority of the United States isn't ready for the paradigm shift. And it's coming really soon. 2043 is the projected year in which Asian Americans and Latino Americans, and Hispanic Americans become the majority ethnicities, or the majority races in the United States thereby causing white people or Caucasians to be a minority for the first time in the history. Is the United States ready to being a paradigm shift in racial conversation? I'm not so sure about that. At least (--)

Interview ends with informant in mid-sentence.

jw